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INACCURACY OF TRADE STATISTICS.

At a meeting of this Association of Chambers of Commerce of the United Kingdom, held in Paris, September 5, 1900, the following resolution was proposed by A. Serena (Italian Chamber, London) :—

“ That the Board of Trade statistics of imports, classified according to the several exporting countries, are inaccurate as regards articles not imported directly by sea into the United Kingdom ; and that it is desirable to make representations on this subject to the Board of Trade.”

He said the Italian Chamber of Commerce in London wished to bring to the notice of the Associated Chambers of Commerce the remarkable discrepancy between the statistics of Italian imports into the United Kingdom, published by the Board of Trade, and the statistics of exports from Italy to the United Kingdom, published by the Italian Minister of Agriculture and Commerce. The commodities specially alluded to were butter, eggs, and cheese, for which he would give the figures for the four years 1895–1898. For convenience of comparison the Italians returns, as regarded butter and cheese, had been converted from quintals to hundred weights, and the figures for eggs had been reduced from quintals to great hundreds, on the basis of 4½ lbs. to the great hundred. In 1895 the Board of Trade gave the returns for butter as 496 cwts., whereas, according to the Italian statistics, it should be 35,460 cwts. In 1896 the English figures were 1359 cwts., the Italian figures for the same period being 38,414 cwts. In 1897 the English returns gave 1349 cwts., but the Italian figure was 31,540 cwts.; while in 1898 they were 293 cwts. English, as against 32,839 cwts. Italian. In eggs the Board of Trade return for 1895 was 1070 great hundreds, whereas the Italian returns gave 1,632,282 great hundreds. In 1896 English returns gave 622 great hundreds, and the Italian 1,481,255 great hundreds. The English figures for 1897 were 19,530 great hundreds; Italian, 1,383,716; 1898—English returns, 1672; Italian, 1,510,348 great hundreds. The same discrepancies occurred in cheese. In 1895 the Board of Trade gave the quantity as 794 cwts., whereas the Italians gave 49,117 cwts. In 1896 the English gave 1328 cwts., and the Italians, 42,747. In 1897 the Board of Trade gave 946 cwts., whereas the Italians stated the quantity as 43,000 cwts. The 1898 figures given

by the Board of Trade for cheese were 556 cwts., whereas the Italians gave 48,125 cwts. From inquiries made it was clear that the megreteness of the Board of Trade returns was due to the circumstance that butter, eggs, and cheese were exported overland to French, Belgian, Dutch, and German ports, and thence by sea to the United Kingdom, and were entered in the custom house returns as French, Belgian, Dutch, or German imports, despite the fact that, in compliance with the Merchandise Act, they were clearly described on the covering as Italian produce. It was therefore very evident that the English statistics of imports from Italy were absolutely misleading regarding commodities sent overland, and that they must necessarily give a very inadequate expression of the importance of the trade carried on between the two countries, and conveyed a correspondingly exaggerated picture of the volume of trade between the United Kingdom and certain other countries.

The matter had been brought before the Board of Trade, which body admitted that their figures only covered consignments direct by ship from Italy, and stated that the same principle was applied generally through the British import returns, and that any attempts to classify such imports according to the country of production would lead to annoying restrictions. His, Mr. Serena's chamber, thought the reply received was far from satisfactory, and was most inconclusive. They considered the matter of sufficient importance to justify them in submitting it to the meeting. They suggested that before publishing their statistics the Board of Trade should submit them to the various countries interested for comparison and approval, and that in any case they should specify that their figures represented direct shipments by sea only, and that they were unable to classify the consignments sent overland. No doubt, now the subject had been ventilated, other suggestions would be forthcoming, and he would conclude by formally moving the resolution which he had re-